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Métropoles alpines. Vers une nouvelle alliance entre villes et montagnes ?

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# Less Regional Rhetoric, More Diversity. Urbanised Alps in the Interest of Cohesive Societies

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# Less Regional Rhetoric, More Diversity. Urbanised Alps in the Interest of Cohesive Societies

Manfred Perlik

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## The need for a new discourse between the mountain and the plain

- 1 *Urbanisation* denotes the transition from rural modes of production with predominantly local and highly agricultural interactions to the integration of national or international value chains, no matter the morphological aspects or urban density. In contrast, the term *urban development* is more appropriate to describe the effects of spatial density.
- 2 Even those who do not share the comprehensive sociological understanding of the term *urbanisation* cannot deny the status of the Alps as a largely urbanised mountain range. The goal of this article is to assess the recent tendencies of urbanisation and to derive strategies for the further development of the Alpine space. The *Alpine space* is defined as the territory within the perimeter of the Alpine Convention, whereby it is shown that this demarcation has now lost its functional importance. The fringe bordering the Alps is qualified as *peri-alpine*. This is where the large agglomerations and metropolitan regions are located. The *Alpine macro-region* (EUSALP) that was recently formed by the European Union extends from Bayreuth in Germany to La Spezia in Italy and from Lyon in France to Vienna in Austria. This article is based on the hypothesis that the strategies of a development specific to the Alps that have been advocated in Alpine discourse in recent decades no longer correspond to reality. This hypothesis is based on the fact that, within the framework of a differentiation of Europe into fast-growing metropolitan regions and sparsely populated but wealthy mountain regions, the most important decisions and consumption preferences originate in the metropolitan regions. Although they have quite

a rich and longstanding tacit knowledge, the mountain regions can no longer provide relevant counter-measures or counter-models. Furthermore, examples of big differences in prosperity between different European regions show that both particularly prosperous and crisis-ridden regions are confronted with political distortions expressed in the form of nationalism or secessionism. The model of entrepreneurial regional competitiveness that is based on region-specific products and has been promoted since the 1990s has shown itself to be incapable of limiting spatio-social cleavage. This leads to the conclusion that the Alpine regions must actively seek cooperation with the peri-alpine metropolitan regions instead of deluding themselves about the possibility of an independent path forward. In this way, they make clear that they legitimately claim the long-term support of their respective states in order to preserve their particularities and to be compensated for their structural disadvantages. Methodologically, the argumentation is based on an analysis of known socio-demographic processes and recent election and votation results in Europe.

## From urbanisation to Alpine metropolisation

- 3 In 1999, using a database from 1990, we already saw the renaissance of the city as a powerful jurisdiction and decision-maker (RGA 87 (1 & 2), 1999). In some regions, there was still hope that the urbanisation of mountain areas would follow an alternative path to productivist growth, a path of medium-sized agglomerations that could be the driving force behind a catch-up process of mountain areas, although it was already clear that the peri-alpine metropolitan areas had been the winners of the post-fordist change of the 1980s. The functional integration of mountain areas into metropolitan regions was already visible, but its global aspect (e.g. Asian tourism in the Alps) was still underestimated. An ambition prevailed that mountain-specific urbanisation processes could stabilise mountain regions by creating a counter-weight against the overwhelming effects of globalisation. This expectation appears to have failed, although the scenarios of a vast decline did not become a reality. The population in the Alps is quite well-off and not exposed to specific poverty. In addition, regional GDPs around the Alps are the highest in Europe, and the Alpine parts even have a higher GDP than many other European regions. But the disparities are small and fragmented, and the Alpine arc as a whole develops within the framework of a global division of labour where it receives the inferior functions of leisure and residences, while decision making is concentrated outside the Alps in its peri-alpine metropolitan areas. There is some evidence that this functional division creates a new and deeper gap between different interests, territorial cleavages and asymmetric relationships, which also results in different future options between metropolitan and peripheral areas. Repercussions include increasing support for separatist and exclusionary policies in the most recent European referendums and elections (see below). The metropolitan regions on the peri-alpine fringe benefit from the landscape amenities of the nearby mountains, which gives them an additional advantage of diversity in the competition of global cities: “metropolises and ‘their’ Alps” (Borsdorf et al., 2010). Outlying mountain regions lacking scenic amenities are destined to be cut off from further development.
- 4 We can summarise the processes of urbanisation in the Alps over the past few decades as follows: Until the 1970s, the Alpine states aimed to reduce the difference between rural mountain areas and rapidly growing lowlands by building infrastructure and raising

individuals' standard of living. Urbanisation took place but was not perceived as such. There was a differentiated image in the 1990s: The wide valley floors and the fringes became peri-urbanised because of expanding agglomerations.<sup>1</sup> Higher altitudes became depopulated, and parts of the Southern Alps in Italy and France were in decline (Bätzing, Perlik, Dekleva, 1996). During the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the process of metropolisation has accelerated the polarisation between highly productive, diversified metropolitan areas and specialised mountain regions. The financial crisis that started in 2007 affected the Alpine regions less than the metropolitan regions, as former mechanisms repeated: In the boom phase, the dynamic cities and agglomerations profit the most, while in the recession phase the peripheries suffer less (Schuler, Perlik, Pasche, 2004). Nevertheless, after the financial crisis, cities and peripheries struggled because of a lack of public funding for social and regional policies.

- 5 One particularity of the Alps, as compared with other mountain ranges, is its big population (14.2 million), which makes it one of the most densely populated mountain ranges in the world (Alpine Convention, 2015). In the past, this was a unique case. In the light of the current processes, the Alps are now a laboratory for urbanisation processes that are playing out in other mountain ranges, such as the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region (Jacquemot, 2018; Kunze, Perlik, Ruijun, 2018 ).
- 6 In short: In the Fordist era, mountainous parts profited from the trickle-down effects of national welfare state systems in the hope of equal development, even if it was delayed. Today, with Alpine metropolisation, mountain areas are becoming functionally integrated into expanding metropolitan areas as specific parts of metropolitan production systems.

## Theoretic aspects: Increasing disparities between mountain areas and lowland agglomerations

- 7 From a theoretical point of view, we have two starting points: One is linked to the profound regime shift towards post-Fordist liberal-productivist societies; the other is more fundamental and addresses the unsolved problem of capitalist societies, namely the constraint of permanent investment for increasing returns with repeated crisis tendencies due to over-accumulation.
  - a. The post-Fordist turn of the 1980s changed political regulations in favour of capital mobility, technological innovation (= faster devaluation of existing production systems) and individual liberty (including self-responsibility) in response to the decreased profit rate and delegitimisation of previous development concepts, particularly with regard to environmental and cultural trade-offs. While the industrialisation period at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century integrated the Alps into national markets, the post-Fordist turn opened it up to the globalised exchange of goods, capital and workforce. The production process (the regime of accumulation) was linked to vertical disintegration and the deindustrialisation of developed countries, both as a result and as a driving force of changed professional profiles and increased significance of agglomeration effects in favour of metropolitan areas. Large cities include all economic activities that cannot (yet) be standardised; in addition, they offer opportunities to unskilled immigrants. This new context is often seen as an opportunity to provide new options to mountain areas beyond state subsidies. As mountain areas in Europe cannot compete in world markets with their salary system, they have to avoid competition through comparative advantages by inventing unique features. However, they only have those unique selling propositions that offer less value-adding and less

attractive jobs: leisure, landscape and gastronomy (consumer products for the end-user that need global markets and mass production to be profitable), thus quickly destroying its economic model by overuse (recent references on the approach of regulation see Boyer, 2018; on the enlarged definition of capital: Bourdieu, 1979 et 1986; Camagni/Capello, 2010).

- b. The general and unsolvable problem of capitalist societies remains: the problem of an over-accumulation of capital that has been (and is being) continuously produced under the paradigm of increasing growth rates. New placement opportunities become rare. These include the destruction of existing values, the divestment of old sectors and a reinvestment in technological innovations (like biotechnology and energy technologies), the escalation of conflicts and their management (like military engineering and security systems) and – relevant for the mountains – the valorisation of aesthetic and landscape features. Thus, the new residential tourist towers built and planned in the Alps, like in Andermatt, Crans-Montana and Vals, are necessary to preserve the valorisation of financial capital generated elsewhere. Their prerequisite is the anticipation of future needs and, even more, the actively engaged generation of future needs. This is also one aspect of the production of space. Since this investment model depends on a high wage/premium quality strategy, it strengthens the integration of the Alpine areas into global markets and diverts them from their domestic customers as their products are no longer attractive or affordable to them. Moreover, these investments differentiate the socio-economic pattern of mountain regions as these strategies are only possible for the most spectacular sites (for example, the steep and narrow medium sections of Alpine valleys do not profit from high-end tourism); as references see Harvey 1973 and 1982; Smith, 2007)
- 8 The integration of the Alps into their national production and welfare systems during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had two opposing consequences. On the one hand, it led to the well-known flows of depopulation that have affected structurally weak areas and accentuated their weaknesses (Bätzing, Perlik, Dekleva, 1996). On the other hand, it enabled these areas to benefit from the welfare systems of the regional policies established in the prosperous Alpine countries (for Switzerland: Schuler, Perlik, Pasche, 2004). It guaranteed a minimum of territorial solidarity and cohesion between mountains and lowlands. The new liberal-productivist regimes introduced a global division of labour between production and consumption with the arguments of a larger market, entrepreneurial liberty, territorial subsidiarity and self-responsibility (Perlik, 2019). They are eroding territorial cohesion.

## Existing territorial cleavages in Europe

- 9 Although existing literature includes extensive knowledge on regional economic development (with case studies on best practices, examples of the strength of weak ties, the creative effects of innovation etc.),<sup>2</sup> many European regions are affected by relocations and deindustrialisation without receiving a sufficient compensation for the loss of territorial capital. It can be assumed that the affected regions and enterprises knew these best practices and that not all of them made mistakes; whatever the reason may be, however, they failed. What is even more important is that this cataclysm in the industrial world has not had (as is sometimes claimed) the effect of creative opportunities on peripheral brownfields. The winners are the cities with historical government functions. They have benefitted from structural changes in tertiary economies, not the former industrialised hinterland. Worse still, we now see the consequences of a decline in territorial cohesion, which is expressed in plebiscites and elections. This concerns both

poor and rich regions. Many poor territories, decoupled from economic development, have become familiar with a hard nationalist course in a social disguise while, on the other hand, prosperous sub-territories show a cultural arrogance that frees them from their responsibility towards poorer regions. The former develop an exclusive and hateful attitude towards immigrants and different social practices; the latter cultivate a regional selfishness ranging from demands for economic autonomy to formal secession. This interpretation is based on recent examples from Europe:

- Analyses made after the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom showed a spatial pattern where the majority of Londoners and the country's wealthy Southerners voted to "remain", while a majority of people in the deindustrialised North voted to "leave". This voting pattern was stable and cut across class boundaries. It was not voters' current individual social status that was decisive for their vote but rather the regional decline that they were anticipating in the future. It was based on the continuing polarisation between the booming London and the decaying Midlands (O'Reilly et al., 2016, Rodriguez-Posé, 2018).
- The results of the French and German elections in 2017 showed the decoupled, deindustrialised parts of the territory in both countries (the North and the East, respectively) with a considerable number – even a majority – of far-right votes. The collapse of working class milieus and the common goals of social transformation have resulted in an attitude of exclusion and xenophobia (see, for example, Didier Eribon, 2009, for an auto-ethnographic analysis of his family in France).
- One may add the East European countries, which hoped to be rapidly integrated into a European growth regime. This expectation was not fulfilled quickly enough and turned into isolation and nationalism.

10 The examples of winning regions are no better:

- Since the 1990s, the strong Italian regions of Lombardy and Veneto have intensified a national discourse that has deepened the territorial divide between northern and southern Italy by claiming an independent state for the Po plain.
- In Spain, Barcelona, the country's second-largest metropolitan region, with its hinterland, is trying to leave the state with arguments that highlight cultural differences but also clearly show that it is the allocation of regional added value that it does not want to share with other Spanish regions.
- Thanks to its autonomous status, the mountainous South Tyrol region is able to maintain 90% of the regionally generated taxes for investment on its own territory. It was the concession of the Italian state to pacify the violent post-war ethnic conflicts between the Italian and German-speaking populations. This compromise enables South Tyrol to pay little for rural southern Italy.
- At the level of the European Union, we can add the hard position of Germany during the euro crisis of the 2010s towards the countries of southern Europe.

11 We can explain these expressions of regionalist exclusion by pointing to broken promises of individual social advancement in a declining regional context. Strategies of uniqueness that have been utilised to position weakened regions on world markets have obviously failed and are not sufficient to stabilise them in general – and probably not for all mountain regions. Moreover, mountain alterity no longer serves as an alternative model for a more cohesive society (regardless of whether this hope was justified in the past or not). The functional integration of the mountainous hinterland has created asymmetrical conditions in terms of wealth and future options in favour of lowland and peri-alpine metropolitan areas.

- 12 There are two counter-tendencies that mitigate this asymmetry. First, the Fordist welfare system did not completely collapse. At least the Alps, surrounded by prosperous lowlands, do not suffer. Knowledge about territorial solidarity is still present, and the financial means for support are available, at least in the richer parts of Europe. In addition, the mountain regions still have enough standing to assert their interests at the national political level, at least in part.
- 13 Secondly, the mountain regions are trying to adapt. In the context of diverging external interests (between mountain and lowland areas) and internal socio-economic transformations (between local actors), Alpine territories are seeking complementary functions and relations with peri-alpine conurbations:
- In Switzerland, the Alpine cantons rejected the Federal Administration's proposal to create one common statistical NUTS2 mountain unit. They preferred to join different, highly urbanised piedmonts (Schuler et al., 1999).
  - The Alpine cantons encourage mergers of small municipalities so that they achieve greater visibility at the national level and have an influence on federal decisions. The most advanced project has been undertaken in the canton of Glarus (40,000 inhabitants), whose population already voted in 2006 in favour of merging their previous 27 into only three large municipalities (since 2011: North Glarus, Glarus and South Glarus). The Bregaglia Valley in the southern Swiss Alps is an example of the merger of very small Italian-speaking municipalities. Its 1,600 inhabitants live in seven villages and some very small fractions, which previously formed five independent municipalities. In 2010, they merged into a single municipality covering the entire valley.
  - The specific functions proposed by the national planning authorities in response to the growing demands of an urban majority in the lowlands (especially the demand for more national and regional parks) have become more accepted by the mountain population, although such projects are sometimes rejected by the local population.
  - Several examples of social innovation in rural and mountainous areas show that mountain populations develop strategies to maintain their habitats but realise that they must be open to external trends (SIMRA, 2017).
  - As far as the Alpine cities are concerned (with the exception of Grenoble, there is no metropolitan agglomeration in the Alps), they strive to remain competitive: They are also trying to compete through incorporation of neighbouring municipalities (e.g. Lucerne and Lugano), develop new urban districts on brownfield sites (Bolzano) or promote their functions as head offices (Innsbruck). Grenoble follows a clear metropolitan strategy, which is similar to other non-Alpine cities in transformation such as Basel, Glasgow or Barcelona.
- 14 The mountain areas of the Alpine states have not, for the most part, joined the current nationalist front of the poor regions of Europe; they are fairly well-off and still have the support of their federal/national governments. They have not completely lost the solidarity of the urban majority, even though, according to the new rules, they should manage on their own. The last elections and referendums showed that the population often votes in a traditional and conservative way but not disproportionately far-right (Carinthia in Austria is an exception in this regard). And also in Switzerland, where an aggressive right-wing party enjoys major political representation, mountain regions vote for their moderate representatives rather than their far-right exponents. The tendencies of the nationalist right are rather a phenomenon of suburban and peri-urban fringes that abuse peasant culture for political marketing. Finally, in Austria, the current president was elected (albeit narrowly) by part of the mountain population who rejected the far-



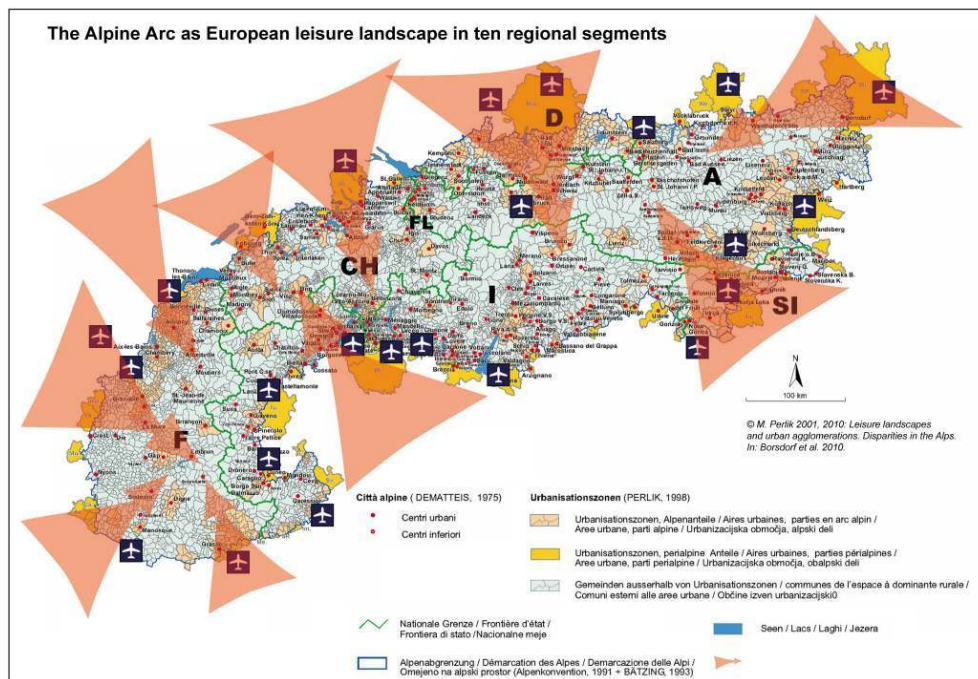
right candidate. However, the examples of recent votes in Europe show how increased regional competition has led to a ticking political time bomb. In the losing regions, civil society structures collapse and with them territorial capital. Conversely, the winning regions abandon solidarity with the losers: either because they do not want to spend taxes or because they want to escape completely into an exclusive state.

## Metropolisation: New competition and different alliances between the Alpine regions

- 15 The fact that the Alps are much better off than many other European regions does not mean that there are no territorial cleavages. The Swiss vote of 2012 on limiting second homes showed a sharp divide between the lowlands and the Pre-Alps/Alps (Schuler/Dessemondet, 2013). Other recent Swiss referendums have shown a wide chasm between the downtown areas on the one hand and the peri-urban and rural areas on the other hand. These gaps indicate a shift from multiple territorial cross-cutting cleavages to one single cleavage. It has been analysed that, in a society, a single but deep cleavage line is more conflictual than different overlapping differences, where stakeholders are necessarily forced to live and work together and have to find compromises (Rokkan/Unwin, 1983). Therefore, transversal cleavages are considered more cohesive and sustainable. In this context, we must ask ourselves whether the former recommendations to strengthen Alpine cooperation, combined with a stronger distinction from the lowlands, are still prudent.
- 16 The integration of the Alps into the global tourism and real estate markets is common to many municipalities. On these markets, they act as competitors. This positioning does not create a common Alpine interest. Furthermore, the Alpine regions remain in their national regulatory modes; they integrate into peri-alpine metropolitan regions, which expand across the slopes and the broad valleys of the Alpine fringe. Whereas in the Fordist era, small and medium-sized towns in the Alps structured the territory as a modified system of central places according to their respective federal state, these towns today have become “edge cities” with high residential qualities within a metropolitan area. In this constellation, national regulations keep their significance, and the Alpine arc is organised into sections according to the metropolitan centre of gravity (map 1).



Map 1: The Alpine arc, segmented into distinct metropolitan areas



Source: Perlik, 2010.

- 17 Metropolises play a dual role as both global cities and national driving forces. For those located near the Alps, the topographical mountain specificities are no longer an obstacle but an asset used to play their international role with “triple-A” status: *adaptivity* to dynamic global change, *attractiveness* for new residents and *authority* in decision making (Perlik, 2019). The different Alpine segments, organised according to their dominant metropolis, express varied interests. Examples include:

- Conflicting interests in transport policy. There is a common objective interest among the inhabitants along the transit corridors, but this common interest is played out against different national strategies.
- Conflicting interests in transport policy between peri-alpine metropolitan areas and interstitial transport corridors.
- The tourist regions do not have a common Alpine interest but organise themselves as competing destinations to exploit the new potential of global middle-class consumption.
- Water quality issues only concern the population of the particular catchment areas.
- Common interests of manufacturing are important on the level of regional clusters (where, meanwhile, each cluster is nearly unique to the Alpine arc) and as national strategies of industrial policies.
- The transformation of mountain agriculture concerns similar strategies in the Alpine countries (high quality and luxury food), but these products are (reasonably) marketed mainly on the regional and national level; therefore, it concerns national and European regulations and policies.

- 18 While developing divergent interests within the Alpine arc, the link with the plains is becoming stronger through the exchange of labelled products and flows of new migrants or multi-local residents. These flows create a new form of complementarity that, once again, weakens the links between the different mountain regions; this complementarity

has been called a productive-residential system (Davezies/Talandier, 2014). This conceptualisation can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain or regain territorial solidarity at the national level between its different regional components, which have taken divergent development paths: high-productivity city centres and sparsely populated or deindustrialised residential districts with spatial reserves on green- and brownfields. But this linkage can only play a fruitful role on a national (or even European) level if there is a common understanding of mutual solidarity and territorial cohesion between regions with different value-adding characteristics.

- 19 We now see much more clearly than in the 1999 thematic issues of JAR/RGA on cities in the Alps (RGA, 87(1); RGA, 87(2)) that mountain development currently follows the same logic as in the plains. Mountains are valued according to the conventional mechanisms of the market economy and to the same degree of globalisation as in other territories because they produce:
- economies of scale, according to comparative advantages with an increased division of labour and functional separation: decision making in metropolitan areas, consumption in urbanised scenic peripheries under the label of quality of life or *amenities*.
  - economies of scope, by inventing new products, especially through commodification, ie transforming public goods into private resources and establishing value chains with the unique selling proposition of *landscape* or *nature*.
- 20 However, the trajectory of regional uniqueness did not turn the page in the direction of territorial stability, as is evident from the rising social cleavages after the 2007-2008 crisis both inside and outside the mountains. On the contrary, specificities served as a tool to feed new forms of egoistic regionalism and national rhetoric about value production, distribution and consumption (Davezies, 2015). Moreover, global transformations have reinforced the importance of material well-being and social justice by showing the shortcomings of a cultural interpretation of social distinction: first, because the culturalist approach neglects the material origins of the culture produced, and second, because the attraction of otherness or landscape difference also opens up the potential for unwanted disparities and increased social cleavage.
- 21 We conclude that the emphasis on regional specificities and the current interpretation of specific mountain development must be studied and reoriented towards maintaining differences and diversity while avoiding growing disparities. In view of the main trends at present, it is unlikely that a reinforced Alpine arc will be able to develop its own models of counter-tendencies. Moreover, if we consider the European cleavages of tangible and intangible wealth and the message of exclusion emanating from regionalist approaches, the idea that the Alps are becoming an island of happiness is not a sustainable model. We must, therefore, ask ourselves the following question: Is it still legitimate to draw up a specific Alpine development strategy that cannot or will not avoid regionalist thinking in the Alps? And if not, what would be the alternatives in order to protect the interests of peripheral territories?

## A renegotiation between mountains and lowlands on a European level

- 22 While our analysis is economic, the conclusions for a new balance between territories can only be based on a political discourse, which clearly needs normative arguments. To this

end, we refer implicitly to the concept of sustainable development and explicitly to the objectives of territorial cohesion.

- 23 We have tried to show that metropolitan areas have the advantages of high added value and a diversified economy and can offer the necessary headquarter functions that have historically been lacking in the Alps. This context creates an asymmetrical relationship that is reinforced by the transition from Fordism to liberal-productivist regimes since the 1980s. This period between the 1960s and 1980s was fuelled by the idea of equal development, and for a decade the Alps became a counter-model to the deterioration of cities, visible in a new discourse on the Alps (e.g. Bätzing, 1984) and the practices of urban youth (who, in Switzerland, became enthusiastic about alpine summer farming; Schütz, 2010). In the 1990s, cities regained their supremacy by offering maximum options for work and life without the former agglomeration diseconomies such as pollution and congestion. Today, large cities are in a position to generate major risks (e.g. security), but at the same time, they have access to the resources required to solve them. Urban structures have shown great resilience over the long term in recent centuries; it appears that this resilience will continue, at least in the medium term. Therefore, it always seems justified to demand the reinforcement of urban development in the mountains in the sense of a multiplication of life chances and regional interaction. On the other hand, sectors with lower added value are declining but still prove their resilience in times of crisis (Dematteis, 2010; Kasimis, Papadopoulos, 2013; Schuler, Perlik, Pasche, 2004; Vianey et al., 2017). From a sustainable development perspective, this makes them indispensable.
- 24 Mountain areas do not have the critical mass of population needed to compete with metropolitan areas. Therefore, it is impossible to achieve a balance between metropolitan and peripheral areas by relying mainly on the mechanisms of competition in the market with the creation of sophisticated new products. This strategy is often seen as a panacea but creates sufficient added value only at the cost of increased mobility, fragile specialisation and a small group of beneficiaries. We must also bear in mind that strong cities will not automatically produce strong Alpine regions. Trickle-down effects do not automatically emanate from economic prosperity, although it facilitates them.
- 25 Living and producing in the mountains will never be as efficient as in the plains; in hard and pure market profitability, a large part of these areas must be abandoned. If abandonment does not provide a solution, then differences in productivity must be accepted. Consequently, more emphasis must be placed on rebalancing the relationship between lowland metropolises and less densely populated areas in terms of living conditions and future prospects.
- 26 The recent wave of xenophobic exclusion in Europe can be explained by the unfulfilled promise of social advancement and stable middle-class membership. Regional egoisms are the resulting territorial expression: It is the broken promise of equivalent living conditions in post-Fordist spatial models of regional competition. Until now, the contemporary Alps have been less affected by this form of decline. To avoid social desertification in the long term, they must not be dissociated from national development or European development. This makes it necessary to renegotiate mountain-plain relations, which should include the following propositions:
  - a. *The highly hierarchical functional division of labour between territories should be reduced* in order to avoid a social and territorial cataclysm; it is rarely cohesive. Non-cohesive structures increase social cleavage lines along regional boundaries and degrade the inferior territory even more, especially under the conditions of high social and spatial mobility. Experience

from periods of recession shows that the peripheries remain necessary and should continue to be populated. The nationalist currents show that regional disparities have to be minimised. In this sense, certain elements of the Fordist societies (like a full-coverage network of public services) might have to be reconsidered, although there will be no way back to these regimes as they also had a character of exclusion.

- b. *Landscape commodification strategies focused on a bundle of niche markets have their limitations* and will not ensure the future of mountain regions in their entirety. As there is always a gap in the creation of added value between the plains and the mountains, it will always be necessary to support mountain regions with a share of metropolitan added value. In order to be attractive in the long run, mountain specialisation must be balanced by sufficient economic diversity. Specialisation should only be accepted if there is sufficient federal or European solidarity as insurance. The specific potential of mountains must be viewed with scepticism as long as their leading sectors generate a structurally lower added value than other sectors. This compromise will probably require more political regulation based on democratic voting – “more state” instead of less, as was also expressed in the UNCTAD Yearbook (2017).
  - c. *In many cases, the productivity of mountain peripheries has to improve.* Doing so requires certain trade-offs against a high diversity of the regional economy. Such conflicts of interest require a serious and broad discussion between all stakeholders on a high knowledge base.
  - d. *A high price strategy for labelled food is questionable* because it can lead to a simple marketing action where it risks being abused and over-exploited. It can only be sustainable if the (necessarily small-scale) Alpine production is limited to regional markets. But in this case also the earnings remain modest.
  - e. *The promise of equivalent living conditions should be realised throughout the territory* (. The existing territorial capital can only be exploited if there are equivalent living conditions and if the territorial capital is used in its entirety and not selectively reduced to its landscape features. The diverse ways of life are in the interest of individual human well-being and necessary to develop societal counter-models. Landscape diversity should not be abused to serve particular interests. The intensification of institutional and informal interdependence between the Alpine territories and adjacent metropolitan areas can reduce territorial divisions and avoid segregation conflicts.
  - f. *Different ways of life have to be respected mutually.* This is valid for representatives of a rural or peri-urban way of life as well as for those with urban value systems. Urban communities have to abandon a certain arrogance about a higher and more progressive culture. Cities have an interest in their mountain assets, which they can only utilise if they respect the habits of the mountain populations. Mountain regions have produced for external markets for a long time, but their populations have to accept that the needs of their external clients might have changed. They also have to accept that they might not be lacking hard infrastructure but institutions for higher education.
  - g. In the Alps, the main problem is no longer wealth in terms of GDP and purchasing power but the perspective of future life, including symbolic and social capital and the mountain societies’ ability to evolve (which may be interpreted as social innovation).
- 27 The Alpine regions have always been closely linked to the peri-alpine plains. As a result, the inhabitants gained new insights but repeatedly had to assert and defend their position because of external influences (Rosenberg, 1988). In the Fordist welfare state of the 20th century, this was about participating in economic growth. Under current liberal-productivist conditions, the urban majority paradoxically regards mountain areas as a public good (Debarbieux/Price, 2008), even though they are primarily responsible for generating value added themselves under market rules, which is increasingly restricting

public space. Furthermore, it is not possible to add this value without massive population growth, and it cannot be achieved in the long term without problematic changes to social structure and ecology. A renegotiation of the relationship between mountains and plains, as proposed by Membretti/Viazzo (2017), seems necessary. This means that, despite all the differences, the reality of mutual dependencies between mountain regions and neighbouring metropolises is accepted as a common community of values. The proclaimed but increasingly formal autonomy of mountain regions should be replaced by mutual support between metropolises and mountain regions. This mutual support must go beyond national borders and cover the entirety of the Alpine arc. In this regard, efforts to create an Alpine macro-region – if they ultimately include effective policy instruments – could make sense.

## Conclusion

- 28 Today's predominant regional development strategy requires mountain regions to specialise in their landscape resources and to valorise them as entrepreneurs. We started with the hypothesis that this strategy must be called into question, given the increasing spatial inequality in Europe. In the peripheral areas, this inequality is mainly the outcome of different development opportunities. It is expressed in an increasing social cleavage: Major trends in rich regions are moving in the direction of leaving the nation state's community of solidarity; in poorer regions, the exclusion of foreigners and migrants is gaining traction. Urban areas, including in the Alps, attract an educated and more prosperous population and are more effective at handling social conflicts. The gap between the core city and peri-urban communities is widening. In the interests of cohesive societies, it does not seem very expedient in this situation to further intensify competition between the regions and to allow them to act as entrepreneurial players on the market. On the one hand, not all regions are in a position to do so. On the other hand, the valorisation of landscape resources means that they must be highly profitable (risking overexploitation) so that the population in the Alps do not migrate to other regions.
- 29 However, average profitability can often only be achieved through large business structures that fuel global mobility, are problematic for ecological reasons and exclude the local population from use. The current division of European societies confirms the historical work on the resource character of social relations (Bourdieu's capital approach, interpreted as territorial capital) and the positive effect of many – albeit flat – lines of conflict in a society (Rokkan's cross-cutting cleavages). In this light, the focus of regional development on a narrowly defined Alpine identity that refuses to serve the interests of the peri-alpine metropolitan regions increasingly appears to be counter-productive: on the one hand because it eliminates the many conflicts in favour of a single deep conflict between citadel-city and the non-city, and on the other hand because it separates the peripheral regions from external knowledge, which they need if they want to be "sustainable". Social innovations, which are particularly important for regions with a sparse population, can only be developed if there is sufficient regional self-confidence, as well as an opening to external knowledge. This is probably the only way to defend structures and ways of life worth preserving vis-à-vis the majority of the population living in urban regions. Under certain conditions, the concept of European macro-regions could offer a way out of the tension between identity and openness, as their geographically widespread composition bridges trenches of prosperity and national

borders. For them to actually do so requires sufficient competence and the willingness to shape the relationship between the Alps and the plain in such a way that the interests of the mountain population to work and live in mountain regions under the special conditions of topography remain satisfied.

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## NOTES

1. In 1990, 59% of the population of the Alps lived in urban areas; 18% of them were part of peri-alpine agglomerations and metropolitan areas (i.e. outside the perimeter of the Alpine Convention). 66% of jobs in the Alps were located in urban areas (Perlik, 2001); see also Map 1, as well as Schuler, Dessemondet, Perlik, 2013.

2. Among others, we cite the well-known works of Michael Porter, Richard Florida, Mark Granovetter and Joseph Schumpeter.

## ABSTRACTS

The current regional development strategies require mountain regions to specialise in their landscape resources and to value them independently. The hypothesis is that this strategy has to be questioned in view of increasing spatial inequality in Europe. In the peripheral areas, this inequality is mainly due to differences in development opportunities. It finds its expression in an increasing social cleavage, which in turn is expressed in polarized voting practices of the population: Rich regions are acting regionalist in order to leave the larger community of solidarity of the nation state. Poor regions see nationalist and openly racist currents spreading.

Cities, including those in the Alps, attract an educated and more prosperous population and are able to handle social conflicts more generously. The gap between the large core cities and their hinterlands is widening.

In the interest of cohesive societies, it does not seem very expedient in this situation to further intensify regional competition by selectively valorising landscape resources. On the one hand, not all regions are in a position to do so. On the other hand, the valorisation of landscape resources, especially in the Alps, means that it must be profitable for their inhabitants so that they do not out-migrate. However, average benefits are only achievable through large economic structures. In turn, they fuel global mobility, are problematic for ecological reasons and often exclude the local population from use. The current division of European societies confirms the historical work on the resource character of social relations (Bourdieu's concept of capital, interpreted as territorial capital) and the positive effect of many but flat lines of conflict in a society (Rokkan's cross-cutting cleavages). In this light, the focus of regional development on a narrowly defined Alpine identity, which refuses to serve the interests of the neighbouring metropolitan regions, appears increasingly counterproductive. On the one hand, because it cancels out the many conflicts in favour of one single deep conflict between extra-Alpine metropolitan regions and an alpine pseudo-rurality, and on the other hand, because it cuts off the peripheral regions from external knowledge, which they need if they want to be "sustainable". Social innovations, which are particularly important for sparsely populated regions, only arise if there is an open mind towards external knowledge in addition to regional self-confidence. This is the only way to defend structures and ways of life worth preserving against the majority of the population living outside the Alps.

The concept of European macro-regions could offer a way out of the tension between identity and openness, provided that these macro-regions seriously attempt to bridge prosperity gaps and national borders with their geographically wide demarcation. In order to do so, they need sufficient competence and the willingness to shape the relationship between the Alps and the plain in such a way that the interests to work and live in the mountain regions under the special conditions of topography are safeguarded. This will not be possible without cross-subsidisation; to achieve this, mountain areas will have to some extent respond to the needs of urban areas. The task remains to renegotiate relations between the Alps and the plains in order to redefine complementarity between them on the basis of a new territorial solidarity.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** urbanisation, regionalism, rural-urban linkages, European macro-regions, cross-cutting cleavages, territorial capital, social innovation

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